

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 121906Z MAY 78

FM AMCONSUL TORONTO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7204

INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TORONTO 0821

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SOPN, CA

SUBJ: TORONTO MEDIA REACTION TO PRIME MINISTER'S
ANNOUNCEMENT OF NO ELECTION THIS SUMMER

1. COMMENTATORS IN TORONTO FOR THE PAST WEEK HAVE BEEN CLAIMING THAT SHOULD PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU AVOID SUMMER ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, HE IS EFFECTIVELY FINISHED AS LEADER OF THE LIBERALS. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM SEEMS TO BE THAT THERE IS NO WAY THAT TRUDEAU CAN SATISFACTORILY EXPLAIN HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO GO TO THE VOTERS AND THAT BEFORE THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION HE WILL BE TURNED OUT AS LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AND JOHN TURNER WILL TAKE HIS PLACE.

2. IN A COMMENTARY THE EVENING OF MAY 11, FRASIER KELLY, POLITICAL EDITOR OF CTV AFFILIATE CFTO, BUILT ON HIS FORECAST OF THE PAST WEEK THAT TRUDEAU WOULD NOT CALL ELECTIONS FOR THE SUMMER BY NOTING THAT ONE MIGHT SAY THAT WHILE TRUDEAU WAS HOPING FOR A BETTER MIX OF VOTER FACTORS IN THE FALL OR SPRING OF 79 AND OTHER COMMENTS COULD BE MADE ON THE RATIONALE FOR THE DELAY IN THE ELECTION, ONE THING THAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THE LIBERALS AT PRESENT COULD HARDLY BE IN A WORSE POSITION IN THE
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VITAL AREAS OF METRO TORONTO AND SOUTHERN ONTARIO IN GENERAL. KELLY'S COMMENT FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL MINUTES THE BACKGROUND EDITORIAL BY BRUCE PHILLIPS ON THE CTV NATIONAL NEWS WHICH CALLED THE DECISION BY THE PRIME MINISTER INESCAPABLY ONE OF FEAR TO GO BEFORE THE VOTERS.

3. THE TABLOID TORONTO SUN MAY 12 CARRIED THE FRONT PAGE HEADLINE "INSIDE GRITS SAY PIERRE'S FINISHED - TRUDEAU REFUSES TO BUDGE AND NO ELECTION." INTERNAL ARTICLE HEADLINED "PM DUCKS ON VOTERS, GRIT KNIVES COME OUT", BEGAN "PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU 'JUST SEALED HIS FATE' AS LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY BY REFUSING TO CALL A SUMMER ELECTION, A SENIOR LIBERAL OFFICIAL TOLD THE SUN LAST NIGHT. 'THE MOVEMENT TO GET HIM TO RESIGN WILL START ROLLING FROM HERE ON IN. WE KNOW HIS CHANCE TO WIN IN THE FUTURE WILL DIMINISH; HE IS NOW SEEN AS A WANING STAR', THE OFFICIAL SAID." THE EDITORIAL IN THE SUN, "CHICKEN?", STATED THAT THE "PROCRASTINATION REVOLVING AROUND AN ELECTION HAS INDICATED, CONTRARY TO CONVENTIONAL WISDOM,...THAT TRUDEAU IS A COWARD...A POLITICAL CHICKEN-HEART." THE SUN CONCLUDED "THAT BARRING A MIRACLE, TRUDEAU IS A SPENT FORCE. WE JUST WONDER WHAT ADDED DAMAGE HE'LL DO BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT YEAR...WE CAN WAIT." SUN COLUMNIST DOUGLAS FISHER IN COLUMN "THE MYTH THAT NEVER WAS" ALSO ATTACKS "THE PRIME MYTH...THAT TRUDEAU IS A VERY DECISIVE PRIME MINISTER (OR HAS BEEN)." IN ADDRESSING THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE MAY 11 FISHER WROTE "TO GIVE TRUDEAU HIS DUE, AND A TRIBUTE TO A CERTAIN KIND OF TOUGHNESS, HE STUCK TO HIS SOPHISTRIES AND PREVARICATIONS FROM ONE END OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE TO THE OTHER." FISHER WROTE THAT CHATS WITH FOUR LIBERAL

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PARLIAMENTARIANS DURING THE PAST TEN DAYS HAVE ELICITED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS: THE CENTRAL PROBLEM THE GOVERNMENT FACES IN RE-ELECTION IS TRUDEAU, NOT THE DOLLAR OR THE ECONOMY OR NATIONAL UNITY"; THAT TRUDEAU IS A CAUTIONS LEADER WHO LEADS A "SLOW MOVING, RATHER INFEXIBLE, STODGY GOVERNMENT," AND, AS ONE OF THE FOUR TOLD FISHER, TRUDEAU IS "AS INSULATED FROM REALITY MOST OF THE TIME AS A SENIOR OTTAWA CIVIL SERVANT."

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4. IN A FRONT PAGE ANALYSIS ARTICLE, THE MAY 12 TORONTO STAR WROTE "PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU MAY NEVER FACE CANADIANS IN ANOTHER ELECTION. TWICE - LAST FALL AND NOW - TRUDEAU HAS LET GO THE CHANCE TO FIND OUT OF WHAT THE VOTERS THINK ABOUT HIM. THE THIRD CHANCE MAY NEVER COME HIS WAY. THIS IS ONLY A POSSIBILITY. NO MORE THAN THAT. BUT A REAL POSSIBILITY." AFTER DISCUSSING VARIOUS OPTIONS, RESIGNATION, ETC., THE STAR CONTINUED "TO MAKE THE DECISION EVEN MORE AGONIZING, TRUDEAU'S ALL-BUT-CERTAIN SUCCESSOR, FORMER FINANCE MINISTER JOHN TURNER, COULD RETURN FROM EXILE IN TORONTO, TO SWEEP THE COUNTRY, BOTH LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES IN PRIVATE AGREE, AS EASILY IN QUEBEC AS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADA." THE STAR'S LEAD EDITORIAL "TRUDEAU HAS TO ACT LIKE A LEADER" WARNED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT "CYNICAL PLOYS, SUCH AS ADMEN DRAWING UP A NEW IMAGE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE CABINET TRAVELLING THE COUNTRY DISPENSING POLITICAL GOODIES, WILL ONLY REINFORCE AN ALREADY STRONG PUBLIC FEELING THAT TRUDEAU AND HIS CABINET ARE UNABLE TO DEAL WITH REAL PROBLEMS." THE STAR UNDERLINED THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN THE TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT AND ALSO THE NEWSPAPERS'S DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE FACT THAT TRUDEAU, "A CIVIL LIBERTERIAN IN HIS UNCLASSIFIED

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DAYS BEFORE BEING ELECTED MP...HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE AUTHORITARIAN AND SECRETIVE, CURBING THE RIGHTS OF FREE CITIZENS INSTEAD OF STRENGTHENING THEM." THE STAR CONCLUDED "IF TRUDEAU IS TO REGAIN THE CONFIDENCE OF CANADIANS HE WILL HAVE TO FILL THAT NNEED FOR LEADERSHIP AFTER ABDICATING IT FOR SO LONG."

5. COMMENT - INITIAL REACTIONS IN TORONTO SUGGESTS THAT THE DELAY TO THE ELECTIONS HAS DONE TRUDEAU MORE HARM THAN GOOD. HOWEVER, IT DOES GIVE HIM TIME TO RESTORE HIS IMAGE, IF THAT IS STILL POSSIBLE, IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY FULLY

EXPECTS THAT THE LIBERALS WILL TURN TRUDEAU OUT BEFORE
THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION AND THAT JOHN TURNER WILL
BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA.
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